



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

## 1002.0 - Australian Statistics Advisory Council - Annual Report, 2014-15

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## Summary

### Transmittal Letter

#### TRANSMITTAL LETTER

The Hon Alex Hawke MP  
Assistant Minister to the Treasurer

I have pleasure in submitting the Annual Report of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council for the year ending 30 June 2015.

The Annual Report outlines the work undertaken by the Council and is submitted to you for presentation to Parliament under sub-section 24(2) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

The Annual Report is dated on the day I approved the text for printing.

Geoff Allen AM  
Chairperson

29 September 2015

## Australian Statistics Advisory Council Mission

#### AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL MISSION

To ensure that, in keeping with Council's statutory charter, the advice furnished to the Minister and the Statistician, in relation to the collection and dissemination of statistics, has due regard to relative priorities, is objective, relevant, timely, constructive and practical, and that it is sensitive to the needs of both suppliers and users of statistical data.

## Foreword

#### FOREWORD

The role of ASAC is to provide guidance to the Minister and the Australian Statistician on the directions of, and priorities for, official statistics. This includes the improvement, extension and coordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia.

The Council met in October 2014, November 2014, May 2015 and June 2015, with discussions covering a broad range of topics including the:

- Council's progress to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Australia's official statistics;

- ABS's strategic directions and forward work program;
- ABS's future sustainability and its comprehensive transformation agenda including the Statistical Business Transformation Program; and
- *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative.

The meeting in June 2015 provided an opportunity for ASAC members to meet face to face with the new Australian Statistician, Mr David Kalisch, who started in December 2014. ASAC looks forward to working closely with him and the ABS in the role of 'robustly critical friends' as the ABS undergoes considerable transformation.

Of profound concern to the Council over the past few years, and as noted in previous Annual Reports, has been the ABS's ageing and fragile business systems and as such, ASAC welcomed the significant investment in the ABS by the Australian Government in the May Budget. I would like to acknowledge the strong interest taken by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, the Hon Kelly O'Dwyer, and the Treasurer, the Hon Joe Hockey to ensure the ABS is better positioned to meet the information needs of today's dynamic economy and changing society.

The Council has continued to highlight the issues across the statistical system due to a lack of coordination, integration and cohesion of official statistics and has been calling since 2010 for a national approach to improve the quality and efficiency of Australia's overall official statistical system. Modernisation of the ABS's current legislation is an important first step in the reform process and needs to be addressed. However, the need for reforms in the national statistical system are much broader, and as such, ASAC has been leading the discussion with the Crisp Revisited Project and the development of a forward looking national statistics policy. In 2014, ASAC provided a submission to the National Commission of Audit detailing the need to reduce the duplication of data collection, standardise definitions and make better use of administrative data, which was recognised in the final report as a priority. ASAC has also resolved to raise the question of an integrated statistics policy through the Reform of the Federation White Paper process.

Encouragingly, there have also been a number of Australian Government initiatives aimed at expanding access to useful public sector data, which are showing promising signs such as the Digital Transformation Office, the Cross Portfolio Data Integration Oversight Board and the Data Sharing and Efficiency Working Group. However while there are a number of data initiatives underway there is a need for a coordinated approach. Reforms must go beyond the Australian Government and include state and territory governments to ensure maximal statistical services are provided for public purposes. With the exponential increase in the availability of data, and the capacity of information technology to harness the data, as well as today's recognition of the value of data holdings there is a critical need to reform the current fragmented national statistical system.

Reforming the national statistical system remains a critical priority for ASAC and the Council will continue to push the case for reform and pursue opportunities to work with others to progress these reforms.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

The Council has seen a number of changes to its membership this year with the terms of Dr David Gruen, Mr Matt Cowgill, Mr Clem Doherty, Mr Saul Eslake and Ms Elaine Henry OAM ending. I would like to take this opportunity to thank departing members for their contributions to the work of the Council. The work Council members undertake to support the activities of the ABS, and further the development of the NSS, is highly valued. In particular, I'd like to acknowledge the contributions of long-term members Mr Clem Doherty who served on the Council for 17 years and Ms Elaine Henry who served for 9 years; their ongoing commitment to the Council over many years has been greatly appreciated. Sadly, I would like to acknowledge the passing of former ASAC member Professor Graeme Hugo earlier this year, his wisdom and commitment to the Council during his time as a member was invaluable.

I would also like to welcome Mr Anton Voss, Ms Kathy Goth, and Mr Mathew Quillinan who formally joined the Council in the past year, and Mr David Johnson whose membership was renominated, their combined experience and expertise will add many benefits to the Council.

It has been another busy year for the Council. I would like to thank Council members for their dedication and counsel concerning Australia's statistics. I would like to acknowledge and thank the Hon Steven Ciobo MP, for his interest in the Council during his time as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Hon Kelly O'Dwyer MP for her early recognition of the need to bring improvements to the national statistical system since taking over as Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer.

I would also like to convey my appreciation to the ABS staff members who provide secretariat services to the Council, arranging our meetings each year and administering ASAC memberships.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Council, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, the Australian Statistician, State and Territory Governments and other key stakeholders in the National Statistical System to build a richer portfolio of official statistics for Australia.

This report will be available on the Council website ([asac.gov.au](http://asac.gov.au)), which also contains information about the Council, including meetings, functions and membership.

**Geoff Allen AM**  
**Chairperson**

## About ASAC

### ABOUT ASAC

ASAC was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

Under subsection 18(1) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*, the Council is to advise the Minister and the Australian Statistician on:

- a. the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;*
- b. annual and longer term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and*
- c. any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.*

The Act enables the Minister and/or the Australian Statistician to seek the advice of Council on these matters. The Council works closely with the Australian Statistician and the Council Chair meets regularly with the Minister to ensure advice and assistance is readily available to them.

The Act provides that the Council shall consist of a part-time Chair, the Australian Statistician (ex officio), and between 10 and 22 part-time members, including one nominee from each State Premier or Territory Chief Minister. The responsible Minister appoints the Council Chair for five years and members for periods of up to three years. Members are eligible for reappointment when their membership expires. The membership of the Council as at 30 June 2015 is detailed in the *Membership of ASAC* section.

Subsection 24(2) of the Act provides that: *the Council shall, as soon as practicable after 30 June in each year, prepare and submit to the Minister, for presentation to the Parliament, a report relating to matters connected with the operation of this Act.*

## Summary of Activities for 2014-15

### SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES FOR 2014-15

The Council held four meetings during 2014-15, on 10 October 2014, 19 November 2014, 22 May 2015 and 30 June 2015. (See *Agenda for ASAC Meetings* section for agenda listings.)

## **NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM (NSS) AND ASAC'S ROLE**

The Council continues to focus on improving coordination, integration and cohesion of national statistics and making better use of administrative data sources.

ASAC welcomed the Australian Government's invitation for the ABS to submit proposals on desirable changes to the ABS's legislative framework as this leads into the wider reform work of the national statistical system that ASAC has been progressing with the Crisp Revisited Project.

The ASAC conceived and driven Crisp Revisited project aims to make improvements to Australia's national statistical system. A key focus this year has been on the situational analysis of the National Statistical System with ASAC working with the ABS to commission a confidential report by former Australian Government Secretary Mr David Borthwick AO PSM. The report makes a number of broad recommendations regarding better management and use of government data across the national statistical system. The Council agreed the Borthwick recommendations were on the right track, and noted that further work was needed in consultation with key stakeholders to develop more specific proposals.

In addition, ASAC continued to refine the development of a draft National Statistics Policy with consultation at the state level. The Council considers this draft policy "state/territory ready" and is satisfied that it could now be successfully adapted by jurisdictions.

ASAC continues to work closely with the ABS to progress the Essential Statistical Assets for Australia initiative, which will allow for effective prioritisation of investment, focus and effort within the National Statistical System. The focus in 2013-14 was on assessing the quality of the assets present on the list of Essential Statistical Assets (ESA) for Australia, which is an agreed list of the most critical official statistics. This year saw the publication of the Quality Assessments of Australia's Essential Statistical Assets in December 2014 (Essential Statistical Assets for Australia Quality Assessments cat. no. 1395.0), which demonstrated the quality of Australia's critical information is positive overall while highlighting areas for improvement and investment. The publication was a major achievement as now, for the first time in Australia, users and producers of statistics have a common understanding of how well Australia's essential statistical assets meet critical dimensions of quality for statistical purposes, including timeliness, coverage and accuracy.

## **ABS TRANSFORMATION AGENDA**

ASAC considered a wide ranging proposal by the ABS to undertake transformational change to all facets of its work program. For a number of years a concerned Council has identified critical needs that this proposal addresses. Government investment in the ABS will allow the ABS to transform its ageing infrastructure, systems and processes used to produce critical statistics as part of its Statistical Business Transformation Program. The Council provided feedback to the ABS on its plans to transform its people and economic statistics programs moving from a collection-centred to a solution-centred approach, to best meet stakeholder needs. Finally, the ABS proposed a broader organisational transformation program based on six elements: understanding and responding to the environment in which it operates; having a clear and focused strategy; having agile and effective governance; an expert, diverse workforce; a work culture that is attuned to high performance; and infrastructure that is fit for purpose for a 21st century national statistical office. The Council welcomed the Government's commitment to facilitate these changes and is providing feedback to the ABS as it moves forward with its transformation agenda.

## **ABS FORWARD WORK PROGRAM**

The Council discussed the major priorities for the ABS's 2015-16 work program noting the increased focus on partnerships, the aspiration to improving access to microdata and the proposed flagship data integration projects. ASAC endorsed the new consultative approach the ABS has adopted to determine its work program through early and indepth engagement with Governments, users and stakeholders using the tiered framework developed in 2013-14 to prioritise its work program. Council members also provided input into the development of a new Corporate Plan for the ABS.

## **2016 CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING**

ASAC monitored progress on the 2016 Census and noted the preparations for the predominately digital first Census were on track. Members acknowledged the Australian Government decision to conduct the Census under the existing Census and Statistics regulations has meant the topics will be the same as those used in the 2011 Census and the 2006 Census. While members were disappointed that a range of other identified needs for small area data gained from the ABS's public consultation process will not be met through this Census, the ABS assured the Council that those requirements will be reviewed in the broader context of the ABS's Statistical Business Transformation Program.

## **The Year Ahead - 2015-16**

### **THE YEAR AHEAD – 2015–16**

ASAC members have agreed on the following issues as Council priorities in 2015-16:

#### **STATISTICAL DIRECTIONS AND PRIORITIES**

Over the next 12 months the Council will advise the Statistician and the Minister on statistical services and priorities on the ABS work program for 2015-16 to 2018-19. In addition, the Council will advise the ABS on the directions and priorities it should be considering to enable it to remain relevant as Australia's National Statistical Organisation (NSO) in the longer term. The Council will continue to engage with members of international statistics committees to gain insights into priorities and risks facing other NSOs around the world.

#### **ABS TRANSFORMATION AGENDA**

ASAC strongly welcomes the opportunities that will arise from ABS's transformation agenda and looks forward to providing robust and critical advice as the ABS continues to gather different perspectives in order to modernise and transform all aspects of its operations and organisation. To assist in the ABS's transformation ASAC intends to sponsor a blue sky discussion on the future of information and data to explore emerging megatrends and proposes to invite expert speakers and influencers in the policy environment.

#### **REFORM OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM**

Progressing reforms to the national statistical system has become a critical focus for the Council. ASAC welcomes the Australian Government's interest in modernising the ABS's legislative framework and will work with the ABS in consultation with stakeholders to develop proposals to bring forward to Government. In addition, ASAC will continue to pursue the wider reform work of the national statistical system and will build on the momentum growing with other Australian Government initiatives to progress the case for a coordinated national approach. ASAC will also pursue opportunities to lead discussions on the need for broader reforms and intends to provide a submission to the Reform of the Federation White Paper.

The Council will continue to champion the Essential Statistical Assets for Australia initiative and ASAC expects work to continue on Phase 3 of the initiative, which will identify the underlying essential statistical infrastructure (ESI).

#### **CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING**

The Council looks forward to assisting the ABS in achieving its plans for a digital Census for the 2016 Census of Population and Housing and will continue to receive regular updates on progress and provide advice on developments as required.

# Membership of ASAC

## MEMBERSHIP OF ASAC

Member	Date First Appointed
<b>Mr Geoff Allen AM</b> Director, ACIL Allen Consulting	1 March 2007
<b>Mr David W. Kalisch</b> Australian Statistician	(ex officio) 15 December 2014
<b>Mr Michael Court</b> Executive Director, Western Australian Department of Treasury	27 July 2011
<b>Ms Kathy Goth</b> Director, Economic and Financial Analysis Branch, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	1 October 2014
<b>Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM</b> Chair Indigenous Health, Professor Public Health, Unit Director Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit, School of Public Health & Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales	8 April 2013
<b>Dr David Johnson</b> Director, Macroeconomic and Revenue Forecasting, Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance	7 November 2010
<b>Mr Chris McGowan</b> Director, National and State Reporting, Cabinet Office, South Australian Department of Premier and Cabinet	22 May 2011
<b>Mr Bruce Michael</b> Deputy Under Treasurer, Northern Territory Treasury	30 January 2013
<b>Dr James Moody</b> CEO, TuShare	15 May 2005
<b>Mr Matthew Quillinan</b> Executive Director, Economic Forecasting and Revenue Analysis, NSW Treasury	14 July 2014
<b>Mr Antony Skinner</b> Director and Queensland Government Statistician, Economic and Structural Policy, Queensland Treasury and Trade	8 April 2013
<b>Mr Anton Voss</b> Deputy Secretary, Economic and Financial Policy Division, Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance	14 July 2014

## CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP BETWEEN 1 JULY 2014 AND 30 JUNE 2015

The following members left ASAC during 2014-15 (either because they retired, resigned or their terms expired):

Mr Matt Cowgill  
Mr Clem Doherty  
Mr Saul Eslake  
Dr David Gruen  
Ms Elaine Henry OAM  
Ms Nicole Masters\*

\*Ms Nicole Masters joined ASAC on 14 July 2014 as the ACT representative and resigned on 26 August 2014 after leaving the ACT public service.

# Operation of ASAC

## OPERATION OF ASAC

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

The Chairperson of the Council receives an annual fee, set by the Remuneration Tribunal, and members are reimbursed their travel costs, where applicable. Apart from the Chairperson, no members receive remuneration for serving on the Council.

Secretariat services for ASAC are provided by the ABS. The office of ASAC Secretary is held by the Assistant Statistician, Office of the Statistician and External Engagement. Secretariat support provided by the ABS includes organising and recording meetings, administering membership and the members' website, and the preparation of the Council's Annual Report.

All costs outlined above are met from within the ABS Budget.

## Agenda for ASAC Meetings

### AGENDA FOR ASAC MEETINGS

#### 30 JUNE 2015 MEETING – AGENDA

1. Summary Record of Previous Meeting
2. Chairperson's Report
3. Statistician's Report
4. Major Priorities for the 2015-16 Work Program, ABS Restructure and Budget
5. Future ABS Strategic Directions – New ABS Corporate Plan
6. Reform of the Statistical System (Incorporating Crisp Revisited Project and Legislation)
7. Update on 2016 Census Preparations
8. Transforming People Statistics
9. Transforming Economic Statistics
10. Bringing Forward Member Issues
11. Members Closed Session

#### 22 MAY 2015 MEETING – AGENDA

An extraordinary meeting was held on 22 May 2015 via teleconference to introduce the new Australian Statistician and to discuss the Australian Government Budget announcement for the ABS.

#### 19 NOVEMBER 2014 MEETING – AGENDA

1. Summary Record of Previous Meeting
2. Chairperson's Report
3. Statistician's Report
4. Update on the Crisp Revisited Project
5. Essential Statistical Assets for Australia – Quality Assessment Update and Essential Statistical Infrastructure Update
6. Emerging ABS Enterprise Risks for Next Financial Year
7. Providing Leadership and Services to Maximise the Use of Government Data
8. Bringing Forward Member Issues
9. Members Closed Session

## **10 OCTOBER 2014 MEETING – AGENDA**

An extraordinary meeting was held on 10 October 2014 via teleconference to discuss the ABS's Forward Work Program.

# **Freedom of Information Statement**

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION STATEMENT**

Below is a statement, as required by section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, about the structure of ASAC and how members of the public can obtain access to information held by it.

### **ESTABLISHMENT, ORGANISATION AND FUNCTIONS**

For information regarding the establishment, organisation and function of ASAC see *About ASAC* section.

### **POWERS**

As an advisory body, ASAC has no decision-making or other powers directly affecting members of the public. It does not administer any enactments or schemes.

### **ARRANGEMENTS FOR OUTSIDE PARTICIPATION**

ASAC members are appointed by the Minister responsible for the ABS so that a broad range of views and interests are reflected in the advice that it offers to the Minister and the Australian Statistician. For membership details see *Membership of ASAC* section.

Persons or bodies outside the Australian Government administration may participate in the Council's policy formulation by making representations to the Minister or the Chairperson on matters of concern to them.

### **CATEGORIES OF DOCUMENTS**

The ASAC Annual Report, which is tabled in Parliament, is available from all ABS offices, and on the ASAC and ABS websites. The ABS maintains files, on behalf of ASAC, which contain documents relating to: the administration of the Council; papers discussed at Council meetings; summary records of proceedings of meetings; and correspondence relating to the activities of the Council.

### **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION PROCEDURES AND INITIAL CONTACT POINTS**

All inquiries concerning access to documents, including inquiries under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, may be directed to:

#### **Secretary**

Australian Statistics Advisory Council  
c/- Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Locked Bag 10  
Belconnen ACT 2616

Telephone: 02 6252 5448

## **About this Release**

Outlines the functions of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council and describes the activities undertaken by the Council to discharge its responsibilities during 2014-15



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